
Electoral Manipulation in Canada: Alberta's Democracy Under Siege

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Project: [Wealth, Power, and Influence: Issues and Solutions](#)

Executive Summary

Alberta is not experiencing a political disagreement. It is experiencing a coordinated assault on the foundational mechanisms of democratic governance - one that mirrors, with provincial specificity, the authoritarian playbook being executed across the United States, Hungary, and wherever else concentrated wealth has decided that electoral outcomes are too important to leave to voters.

The instruments are familiar: partisan redistricting, suppression of independent electoral oversight, the restoration of corporate dark money to political financing, the elimination of voter access protections, the weaponization of separatist grievance, and the deliberate exposure of a sacred electoral list to a far-right paramilitary organization with documented connections to white nationalism and foreign disinformation networks.

This is not a series of governance errors. It is a programme - and the WPI triangle explains it precisely: wealth funds the movement; the movement captures power; captured power rewrites the rules to protect itself. The disease is the same. Only the accent is different.

Contents

1	Background	2
2	The Architecture of Electoral Capture	2
2.1	Gerrymandering: The Map as Weapon	2
2.2	Bill 54: Dismantling Democratic Infrastructure	3
2.3	The Voter List Breach: Democracy Stolen	4
2.4	The Funding Substrate: Chip Wilson and the Dark Money Network	5
2.5	Separatism as Political Technology	6
2.6	Foreign Interference: The Continental Dimension	7
2.7	The WPI Triangle, Alberta Edition	7
3	What Democratic Resistance Requires	8
4	Author	10
5	Recommended reading	11
	References	12
	Endnotes	14

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1 Background

Unchecked, rust never sleeps - it erodes structural integrity.

Likewise, [social conservatism](#) slowly, relentlessly undermines the foundations of a just and democratic society.

There is a question that observers of Alberta politics have been evading with remarkable discipline: if the United Conservative Party governs a province whose population is majority urban, majority moderate on social questions, and majority opposed to separation from Canada - then how does it continue to govern as though it received a mandate for authoritarian reconstruction?

The answer is that it is engineering one. Not through persuasion. Through the systematic dismantling of every institutional check that might translate actual public sentiment into electoral outcomes.

This is not Albertan exceptionalism. It is the global far-right playbook, executed with provincial resources and a provincial accent, and enabled - as always - by concentrated private wealth whose interests are served by a government that is no longer accountable to the governed.

2 The Architecture of Electoral Capture

2.1 Gerrymandering: The Map as Weapon

In early 2026, the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission - a statutory independent body operating under the *Electoral Boundaries Commission Act* - completed its work and submitted its final report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly on 2026-Mar-26.

The Commission's majority report, authored by Chair Dallas K. Miller (a retired Court of King's Bench justice) and commissioners Greg Clark and Susan Samson, recommended redrawing Alberta's 87-seat electoral map to reflect two decades of demographic shift. Its findings were constitutionally grounded: growing urban populations in Calgary and Edmonton had produced severe voter-parity distortions, with some rural ridings exercising three to four times the effective electoral weight of urban ones. The majority's maps corrected this, and Miller's accompanying analysis was explicit: the approach taken by the Commission's two UCP-nominated commissioners, John Evans and Julian Martin, in their minority report was not merely a policy disagreement - it was likely unconstitutional under section 3 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

The minority report proposed urban-rural blended ridings: a technique that slices city neighbourhoods into ridings extending outward into surrounding rural territory, diluting concentrated urban votes by merging them with smaller, reliably conservative rural populations. It is the classic gerrymandering mechanism, and its constitutional infirmity is precisely why Miller named it.

The UCP government's response: discard the majority report entirely.

On 2026-Apr-21, the UCP-majority legislature passed a motion creating the Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries - a six-member MLA committee (four UCP, two NDP) charged with appointing a new advisory panel to draw the maps from scratch. The committee, chaired by UCP MLA Brandon Lundy, includes Chantelle de Jonge, Tara Sawyer, and Ron Wiebe for the UCP, and Kathleen Ganley and Christina Gray for the NDP. Its built-in supermajority ensures that the outcome is not in doubt.

The advisory panel appointed by this committee is, if anything, more revealing. Its chair, Brian O'Ferrall, is a retired Alberta Court of Appeal justice - and a recent UCP donor. The UCP's other nominee, Monte Solberg, is a former federal cabinet minister who, at the time of his appointment, was a registered lobbyist for Finance Minister Jason Nixon - the same minister whose own riding the Commission's majority report

had recommended eliminating. The acting Chief Justice, the Canadian Bar Association, and the Law Society of Alberta all declined to participate in the appointment process.

Elected politicians are redrawing the boundaries of the ridings from which they are elected, using a process they control, staffed with nominees of their choosing, producing maps that will be reviewed by a committee they dominate, in time for an election scheduled for 2027.

This is gerrymandering. The legal dressing - a statutory commission, an advisory panel, a committee mandate - is the laundering mechanism. The output will be the same as the minority report's maps: an electoral geography designed not to represent Albertans, but to entrench UCP power regardless of what Albertans actually vote.

NDP MLA Kathleen Ganley, one of two opposition voices on the committee, has stated plainly that MLAs drawing their own electoral boundaries constitute a clear conflict of interest. She is correct. And the conflict is not incidental - it is the point.

2.2 Bill 54: Dismantling Democratic Infrastructure

Gerrymandering is only one component of what the UCP government, under Premier Danielle Smith, has constructed. Bill 54 - the *Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2025* - represents, in the words of the Alberta Democracy Taskforce, "the most comprehensive assault on democratic institutions in Alberta's history."

Bill 54 was tabled by Justice Minister Mickey Amery on 2025-Apr-29. It received Royal Assent on 2025-May-15 - over the explicit, written objections of Chief Electoral Officer Gordon McClure, who wrote to every MLA warning that the legislation's enforcement threshold changes would "eliminate the majority of compliance activities" and that no other Canadian jurisdiction imposed a comparable standard. The Legislature passed it anyway.

What Bill 54 does, in plain language:

- **Eliminates voter vouching.** Vouching - the longstanding procedure allowing an eligible voter to vouch for another eligible voter who lacks identification - was a critical protection for Indigenous voters, people experiencing homelessness, domestic violence survivors in temporary housing, elderly residents, and other populations whose documentary identification is unstable. Its elimination is borrowed directly from the American Republican playbook of voter suppression. The stated rationale - "election integrity" - is the same rationale deployed by GOP legislatures from Georgia to Wisconsin. The actual function is the same: reducing turnout among populations that vote against the governing party.
- **Bans electronic vote tabulators.** The prohibition on electronic vote-counting machines - deployed safely for decades across Canadian jurisdictions - has no administrative justification. It answers, instead, to the QAnon-adjacent conspiracy ecosystem that has migrated north from the American MAGA movement. It manufactures confusion, slows counts, and creates the conditions under which bad-faith "scrutineering" - the supervised, organized harassment of poll workers and counting staff - becomes operationally effective.
- **Restores corporate political donations.** Alberta's ban on corporate and union donations had been in place for years, and reflected a basic principle: elections should be determined by citizens, not capital. Bill 54 restores corporate donations at a \$5,000 aggregate cap. Given what is documented about the relationship between concentrated wealth and the UCP's political infrastructure - a relationship to which we return below - this is not a technical amendment. It is the formal reintegration of dark money into Alberta's electoral financing system.
- **Weakens electoral enforcement.** The legislation raises the investigative threshold for the Election Commissioner to a standard that, as McClure warned, requires complainants to provide "a substantively completed investigation" before the Commissioner can even begin one. The practical consequence was demonstrated immediately: when journalist Jen Gerson reported a massive electoral

list breach to Elections Alberta in March 2026, the agency concluded it lacked authorization to investigate. The UCP had, by legislative design, built the incapacity into the institution.

- **Expands scrutineers' powers.** Bill 54 significantly expands the access and rights of partisan scrutineers - party representatives stationed at polling stations and counting centres. In the American context, the organized deployment of aggressive scrutineers by right-wing groups to challenge, delay, and intimidate counting processes is a well-documented voter suppression tactic, deployed with particular effect in communities of colour. Alberta has now legislated the conditions for its provincial equivalent.

The architecture of Bill 54 is not random. Each provision removes a protection that stood between concentrated political power and the unchecked manipulation of electoral outcomes. Taken together, they represent the conversion of Alberta's electoral system from a mechanism for registering public will into a mechanism for manufacturing governmental legitimacy.

2.3 The Voter List Breach: Democracy Stolen

On 2026-Apr-30, Elections Alberta obtained a court injunction forcing the Centurion Project - a separatist organization registered as a third-party political advertiser - to take down a publicly searchable online database containing the personal information of 2.9 million Albertan voters: names, home addresses, postal codes, unique voter identification numbers, electoral divisions, and polling station assignments.

This was, in all likelihood, the largest privacy breach in Canadian electoral history.

Elections Alberta has determined that the database was built from an official electoral list legitimately obtained by the Republican Party of Alberta, a registered pro-independence political party led by Cameron Davies - a veteran Wildrose organizer and co-campaign manager of the UCP's 2017 "kamikaze" leadership campaign, for which he was separately fined \$15,000 for obstructing the resulting election investigation. Every electoral list distributed by Elections Alberta is "salted" with fictitious names to enable tracing; an Elections Alberta analysis of the salted names confirmed that the data loaded onto the Centurion Project's app originated from the Republican Party of Alberta's copy of the list. Davies has said he granted vendor access to the list under contract, as permitted by the Election Act for legitimate political work, and rescinded that access by cease-and-desist letter once he learned of its alleged misuse. How the list moved from a Republican Party of Alberta vendor into the Centurion Project's database is the specific question under active investigation by Elections Alberta, Alberta's privacy commissioner, and the RCMP.

The Centurion Project's lead figure is David Parker - the co-founder and executive director of Take Back Alberta, the UCP-aligned organizing network described in Section 2.4, and the organizer credited with the 2022 membership drive that ousted Jason Kenney as UCP leader. Parker has given inconsistent accounts of how the data was obtained: he told The Globe and Mail he purchased a compiled dataset from a third-party vendor for \$45,000, while telling Global News that he rented the data. He has refused to cooperate with Elections Alberta's investigation, declining to sign a statutory declaration agreeing to cease and desist with the list; his lawyer has stated the agency cannot compel him to do so. Parker has publicly described Elections Alberta as "an evil tool of evil people" engaged in "lawfare" against separatist organizations.

This is not Parker's first encounter with Alberta's electoral enforcement regime. In February 2025, Elections Alberta fined Take Back Alberta and Parker a combined \$120,000 for circumventing election advertising spending limits and for accepting political contributions from outside Alberta and Canada - penalties that remain unpaid and have been referred to Crown debt collection.

The consequences of the breach extend well beyond the abstract. A Centurion Project training video featured the home address of former NDP premier Rachel Notley, who received at least 11 documented death threats during her time in office. CBC reporting and Elections Alberta have separately confirmed that the exposed data reached domestic violence survivors in hiding, journalists, and elected officials at every

level of government. Edmonton City Councillor Aaron Paquette reported that his office was helping a domestic violence survivor relocate after the breach.

Take Back Alberta is part of a broader, overlapping organizational network promoting Alberta independence - one that includes the Alberta Prosperity Project (APP), led by CEO Mitch Sylvestre, a former Take Back Alberta regional captain who co-founded the Stay Free Alberta petition campaign that produced the signatures required to trigger the October 2026 referendum question. (Note: despite the similarity in name, no source establishes any organizational or financial connection between the Alberta Prosperity Project and the Vancouver-based Pacific Prosperity Network discussed in Section 2.4 - these appear to be separate organizations that happen to share a common, generically aspirational name.) David Parker has publicly grouped Take Back Alberta, the Alberta Prosperity Project, and Stay Free Alberta together as common targets of what he calls Elections Alberta's "lawfare," and Alberta Prosperity Project's leadership has acknowledged overlapping personnel with the separatist movement broadly - while specifically declining to formally merge with the Centurion Project when offered the chance to do so.

Elections Alberta received the first complaint from journalist Jen Gerson on 2026-Mar-31. It took a month - and a media investigation - before the agency acted. The reason, as the agency itself acknowledged: Bill 54 had raised the investigation threshold to a standard the complaint did not technically meet. The UCP had legislated the delay into the system. The database circulated for weeks. More than 545 people accessed it; 23 received full copies. Cease-and-desist letters were issued. The RCMP launched an investigation. The Canadian Security Intelligence Service director confirmed on 2026-May-09 that the referendum process is vulnerable to foreign interference.

This is not a breach of electoral administration. It is the outcome of a deliberate legislative architecture designed to disable the enforcement mechanisms that might have prevented it.

2.4 The Funding Substrate: Chip Wilson and the Dark Money Network

The WPI triangle is always, ultimately, a story about money. In Alberta, the funding flows that sustain the UCP's political infrastructure and the far-right organizing network around it lead, with particular clarity, to Chip Wilson - the billionaire founder of Lululemon Athletica and one of Canada's most politically active ultra-wealthy conservatives.

Wilson is the founding and largest donor of the Pacific Prosperity Network, a Vancouver-based right-wing political organization - a relationship confirmed by Elections BC's 2022 enforcement action against the Network for third-party advertising violations. PressProgress reporting documented that Take Back Alberta's website, at its launch, listed the Pacific Prosperity Network's phone number and email address as its own points of contact; neither organization responded to questions about the relationship when asked. Wilson has publicly endorsed Take Back Alberta's work, appearing on founder David Parker's podcast, where he stated: "I think there's this globalist agenda attacking our oilsands... we support pro-energy, pro-resource candidates."

What the public record establishes, then, is this: a documented funding relationship between Wilson and Pacific Prosperity Network; documented organizational and infrastructural overlap between Pacific Prosperity Network and Take Back Alberta; and Wilson's documented public endorsement of Take Back Alberta's founder and mission. Whether this amounts to Wilson directly funding Take Back Alberta is not established in the public record as of this writing - neither organization discloses its full donor list, and the structure of political action committees in both British Columbia and Alberta does not require it. That opacity is itself part of the story this article documents in Section 2.4 and 2.6: a donor-disclosure regime that makes the precise financial architecture of this network difficult to verify from outside.

Take Back Alberta - David Parker's organization, which is also the Centurion Project's organizational parent - grew out of the 2022 Coutts convoy blockade, in which hundreds of vehicles shut down the Canada-US

border crossing in protest of COVID-19 restrictions. Several Coutts blockaders were later charged with weapons offences after a cache of high-powered rifles and body armour was discovered. The movement that emerged from Coutts is, in the assessment of Walrus contributor Patrick Lennox, at its core a coalition of Christian nationalists, Wexit separatists, and white nationalists who would, in his words, "be Proud Boys if the Proud Boys weren't a listed terrorist entity." This is Lennox's analytical characterization rather than a finding from a court, regulator, or hate-group registry; the underlying facts it draws on are documented separately in this article - the Coutts weapons cache, the funding networks, the public statements of separatist leaders - and readers should weigh the interpretation against that documented record.

This movement did not seize the UCP. It built it, from the inside. Take Back Alberta credits itself with ousting Jason Kenney in his 2022 leadership review and installing Danielle Smith as UCP leader and Premier. It has taken over nine seats on the UCP party board and multiple regional boards. Its nominee for the UCP nomination in Jason Nixon's riding - Tim Hoven - was disqualified by the party because he followed a website platform linked to white nationalists in the United States.

The UCP is not a conventional conservative party that has been pulled rightward by its base. It is a vehicle that the Wilsons and Parkers of Alberta's far-right built for exactly this purpose, and which is now executing exactly the programme they designed.

2.5 Separatism as Political Technology

Premier Danielle Smith introduced Bill 54 on 2025-Apr-29 - one day after the federal Liberal Party's election victory - framing it as a response to Ottawa's indifference to Alberta's interests. She has since committed to holding a provincial referendum on Alberta's relationship with Canada on 2026-Oct-19, contingent on the separatist petition reaching its threshold. The petition has cleared that threshold.

Alberta separatism is real in the sense that grievance is real. Equalization payments, pipeline politics, and the cultural condescension of central Canada toward resource-sector workers are genuine sources of political frustration that deserve serious engagement. The NDP, federally and provincially, has not always provided it.

But the separatist movement being mobilized by Smith, Parker, Jeff Rath, and the Centurion Project is not a good-faith expression of regional alienation. It is a political technology: a mechanism for concentrating attention, generating outrage, suppressing opposition, and manufacturing the conditions under which the UCP can govern without accountability.

The evidence is structural. Roughly 70 per cent of Albertans consistently oppose separation in polling. First Nations leaders - whose treaty rights predate Alberta's entry into Confederation in 1905 and who signed those treaties with the Crown, not the provincial government - have united in fierce opposition. The Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations has condemned Bill 54 as a "direct violation of the Treaty relationship." Mikisew Cree First Nation Chief Billy Joe Tuccaro threw a copy of the legislation on the floor at a press conference and called it garbage. The constitutional obstacles to Alberta independence include not only First Nations rights but the Clarity Act, the division of federal assets, and the simple fact that an independent Alberta would have no legal claim to the Trans Mountain Pipeline corridor or to federal infrastructure within its territory.

Separation is not achievable. But the separatist mobilization serves its architects precisely because of that unachievability: it generates sustained grievance, it provides a loyalty test that purges moderates from the UCP base, and it creates the political conditions under which all of the electoral manipulation described in this article can be framed as "fighting for Alberta." The manufactured crisis is the cover.

2.6 Foreign Interference: The Continental Dimension

The Alberta separatist movement does not operate in isolation. The Walrus, drawing on analysis by DisinfoWatch, has documented four distinct streams of foreign interference converging on Alberta's electoral and referendum landscape between 2025-Dec and 2026-Apr:

- **Russian-aligned disinformation networks** amplifying separatist narratives, exploiting Alberta's grievances to destabilize Canadian democracy and fragment the last major English-speaking democracy in North America.
- **American far-right political influencers** providing continental reach to separatist content, integrating Alberta's movement into the broader MAGA ecosystem.
- **Profit-driven content farms** manufacturing fake local voices for advertising revenue, indistinguishable from organic Albertan commentary.
- **Electoral data in compromised hands:** the Centurion Project's database, containing the personal information of 2.9 million Albertans, circulated in networks with documented connections to authoritarian foreign states. CSIS director Daniel Rogers confirmed on 2026-May-09 that the referendum process is actively vulnerable to foreign interference.

This is what cognitive sovereignty under attack looks like. It does not arrive with tanks. It arrives as viral videos, anonymous websites, algorithmically amplified outrage, and voter data escaping the legal protections citizens assumed existed. The personal information of every registered Albertan voter - every judge, every journalist, every domestic abuse survivor, every First Nations chief, every civil servant - has been delivered into those winds.

The UCP government's response: Danielle Smith called for accountability. The legislation that made the breach possible remains in force.

2.7 The WPI Triangle, Alberta Edition

The [wealth, power, and influence triangle](#) operates in Alberta with unusual transparency, because the actors are less careful to conceal it than their American counterparts.

- **Wealth** flows from Chip Wilson, from the fossil fuel sector, from the restored corporate donation infrastructure of Bill 54, and from the network of right-wing third-party advertisers - including Take Back Alberta, Alberta Proud, and the Alberta First Initiative - whose combined war chest dwarfs what the NDP can field.
- **Power** is held by the UCP government, which has in six years: dissolved the independent Office of the Election Commissioner (Bill 22, 2019, introduced while that office was investigating UCP leadership race financing irregularities); dismantled Elections Alberta's investigative independence (Bill 54, 2025); discarded a constitutionally grounded independent electoral redistribution (April 2026); and stacked the replacement process with its own nominees.
- **Influence** is manufactured by a media ecosystem that includes Postmedia's dominance of Alberta's newspaper landscape, Rebel Media's far-right digital infrastructure, the Telegram channels of the UCP's base networks, and the foreign disinformation amplification documented by DisinfoWatch.

The triangle is self-reinforcing. Wealth funds the political movement; the movement captures the government; the government rewrites the electoral rules to entrench itself; entrenched power protects and expands the interests of the wealth that funded it. The machinery of democratic accountability - independent commissions, electoral enforcement, voter access protections, free and fair maps - is dismantled, piece by piece, statute by statute, not because it malfunctions, but because it works.

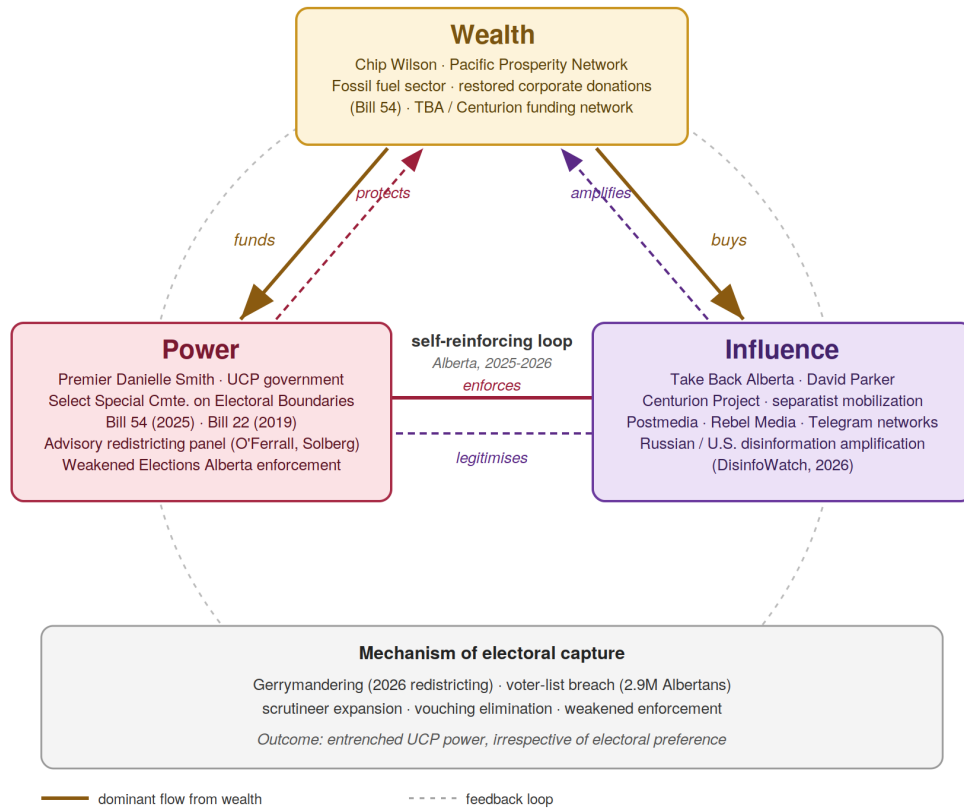


Figure 1. The WPI triangle: wealth funds power; power protects wealth; influence legitimises both.

This is not dysfunction. It is design.

3 What Democratic Resistance Requires

The treatment for this disease is not a better redistribution commission or a strongly worded letter to the Chief Electoral Officer. Those institutions have already been compromised by the same legislative machinery that created the crisis.

Democratic resistance in Alberta requires what it has always required, everywhere that concentrated power has attempted to manufacture its own permanence:

- **Name the disease.** The UCP's programme is not "democratic renewal," "strengthening trust in elections," or "fighting for Alberta." It is the systematic elimination of every institutional mechanism by which collective action could constrain the accumulation and entrenchment of political and economic power. Every mechanism that Take Back Alberta and its billionaire funders work to destroy is, not coincidentally, a mechanism by which democratic accountability becomes possible.
- **Build counter-power.** Unions - which Bill 54 has re-engaged in political financing, a provision whose long-term consequences the UCP may not have fully calculated. Community organizations. Indigenous governance structures, which have proven the most constitutionally robust obstacle to the separatist agenda. Electoral monitoring networks. Investigative journalism - it was a journalist, Jen Gerson, who broke the voter list breach, not the institution that was supposed to prevent it.

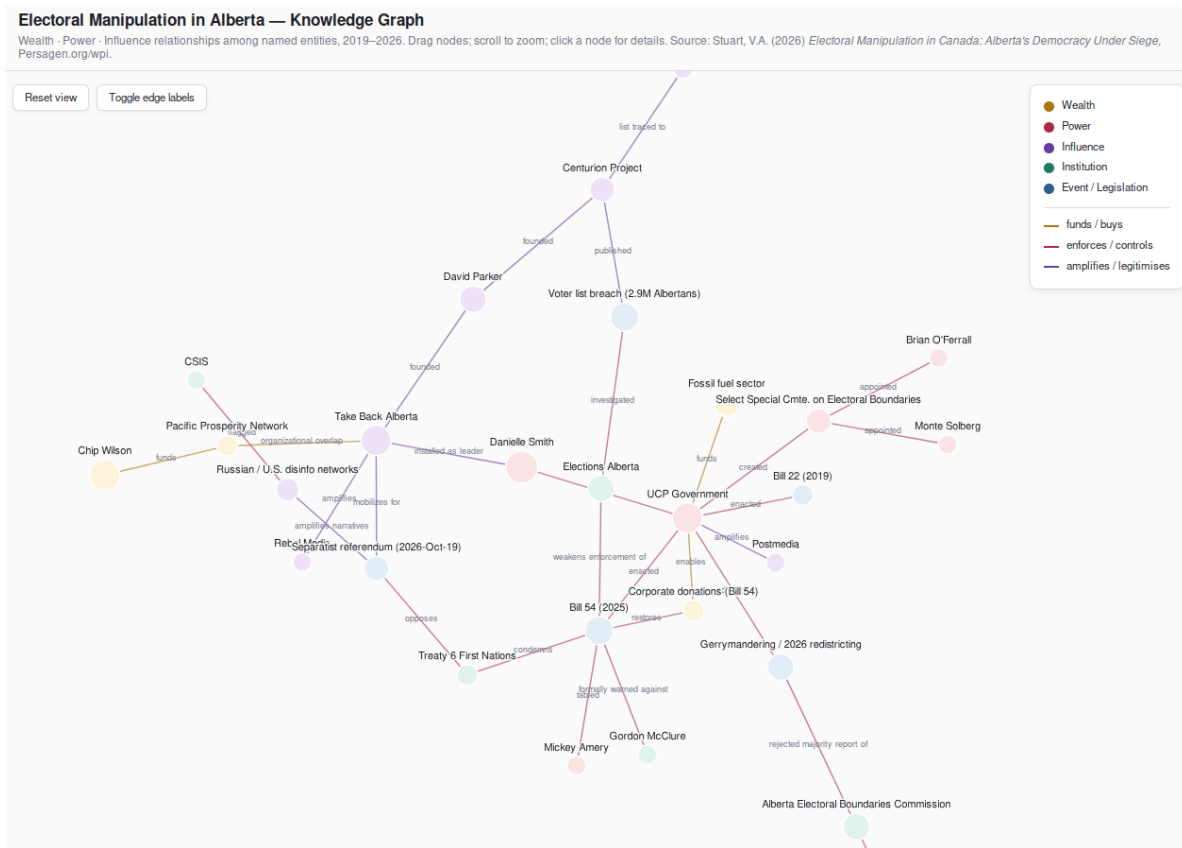


Figure 2. Shown here is a screenshot of an interactive semantic knowledge (property) graph relevant to this article. Please [click here](#) for the interactive version (dark-themed version [here](#)).

- **Defend the franchise.** The specific populations targeted by voter-access suppression - Indigenous voters, people experiencing homelessness, domestic violence survivors, elderly residents without stable documentation - are not marginal. They are the communities whose political participation the governing party has decided it cannot afford. Their enfranchisement is not a service issue. It is the democratic question.
- **Insist on constitutional grounding.** First Nations treaty rights, the *Charter*, and the established jurisprudence on voter parity are not talking points. They are the legal architecture within which Alberta's government must operate - and the framework within which the UCP's electoral programme is most vulnerable to challenge.

The referendum on 2026-Oct-19 will not resolve the democratic crisis in Alberta. It will reveal its depth. What comes after depends on whether the citizens of that province - urban and rural, settler and Indigenous, conservative and progressive - can see the manipulation clearly enough to refuse it.

Recognizing this is itself an act of resistance.

Name the disease. Build the counter-power: [democratic socialism](#).

4 Author

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I gratefully acknowledge that I live and work on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples: the xmkym (Musqueam), Swxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Slílwta (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

Return to [Persagen.org](#)

5 Recommended reading

- Lennox, Patrick (2026-May-04). How Did an Alberta Separatist Group Get Its Hands on the Voter List? The Walrus.
- Rybak, B.E. (2026-May-13). Alberta Separatism Fuelled by Russian Networks and US Influencers. *The Walrus.*
- Alberta Democracy Taskforce (2025). Bill 54 Analysis. albertademocracytaskforce.org/bill-54-analysis/
- PressProgress (2022). Who Is 'Take Back Alberta' and What Do They Really Want?
- Although slightly dated, Jane Mayer's *Dark Money: The hidden history of the billionaires behind the rise of the radical right* (2016)¹ remains topical. *Dark Money* documents conservative and libertarian billionaires' ideologies - which includes the subjugation of women and women's rights,ⁿ¹ eliminating the separation of church and state,ⁿ²⁻ⁿ¹¹ [dominion theocracy](#), eliminating taxation on wealth, eliminating social programs and services, and privatizing federal agencies (e.g. United States Postal Serviceⁿ¹²⁻ⁿ¹⁶).
- Likewise, Nancy MacLean's *Democracy in Chains: The deep history of the radical right's stealth plan for America* (2018)² documents conservative attacks on democracy;
- Legal scholars Jon Michaels and David Noll document the weaponization of state-sponsored citizen vigilantism in their 2024 book *Vigilante Nation: How state-sponsored terror threatens our democracy*.³ That socially devastating strategy originated with attorney [Jonathan Mitchell](#)'s antiabortion [Texas Heartbeat Act](#) (Texas Senate Bill 8 of 2021) [[Persagen.org](#) entry].ⁿ¹⁷ In that legislation Mitchell devised the novel enforcement mechanism of avoiding judicial review of the legislation by prohibiting government officials from enforcing the statute, and empowering private citizens to bring lawsuits against those who violate it. This [was engineered](#) to deny abortion providers the opportunity to seek federal-court injunctions against the enforcement of the statute. Since the law cannot be enforced by state officials but only by private individuals, it is difficult for abortion providers to identify the proper defendants to sue in a pre-enforcement lawsuit, which prevents them from challenging the constitutionality of the act prior to its taking effect. U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice [John Roberts](#) wrote that "the statutory scheme before the court is not only unusual, but unprecedented."

References

- [1] Mayer, Jane (2016). *Dark Money: The hidden history of the billionaires behind the rise of the radical right*. Doubleday. [Wikipedia entry] Who are the immensely wealthy right-wing ideologues shaping the fate of America today? *Dark Money* is an electrifying work of investigative journalism that uncovers the agenda of this powerful group. In her new preface, Jane Mayer discusses the results of the most recent election and Donald Trump's victory, and how, despite much discussion to the contrary, this was a huge victory for the billionaires who have been pouring money in the American political system. Why is America living in an age of profound and widening economic inequality? Why have even modest attempts to address climate change been defeated again and again? Why do hedge-fund billionaires pay a far lower tax rate than middle-class workers? In a riveting and indelible feat of reporting, Jane Mayer illuminates the history of an elite cadre of plutocrats - headed by the Kochs, the Scaifes, the Olins, and the Bradleys - who have bankrolled a systematic plan to fundamentally alter the American political system. Mayer traces a byzantine trail of billions of dollars spent by the network, revealing a staggering conglomeration of think tanks, academic institutions, media groups, courthouses, and government allies that have fallen under their sphere of influence. Drawing from hundreds of exclusive interviews, as well as extensive scrutiny of public records, private papers, and court proceedings, Mayer provides vivid portraits of the secretive figures behind the new American oligarchy and a searing look at the carefully concealed agendas steering the nation. *Dark Money* is an essential book for anyone who cares about the future of American democracy. Doubleday, January 2016.
- [2] MacLean, Nancy (2018). *Democracy in Chains: The deep history of the radical right's stealth plan for America*. Penguin Random House. [Wikipedia entry] Behind today's headlines of billionaires taking over our government is a secretive political establishment with long, deep, and troubling roots. The capitalist radical right has been working not simply to change who rules, but to fundamentally alter the rules of democratic governance. But billionaires did not launch this movement; a white intellectual in the embattled Jim Crow South did. *Democracy in Chains* names its true architect - the Nobel Prize-winning political economist James McGill Buchanan - and dissects the operation he and his colleagues designed over six decades to alter every branch of government to disempower the majority. In a brilliant and engrossing narrative, Nancy MacLean shows how Buchanan forged his ideas about government in a last gasp attempt to preserve the white elite's power in the wake of the 1954 landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*. In response to the widening of American democracy, he developed a brilliant, if diabolical, plan to undermine the ability of the majority to use its numbers to level the playing field between the rich and powerful and the rest of us. Corporate donors and their right-wing foundations were only too eager to support Buchanan's work in teaching others how to divide America into "makers" and "takers." And when a multibillionaire on a messianic mission to rewrite the social contract of the modern world, Charles Koch, discovered Buchanan, he created a vast, relentless, and multi-armed machine to carry out Buchanan's strategy. Without Buchanan's ideas and Koch's money, the libertarian right would not have succeeded in its stealth takeover of the *Republican Party* as a delivery mechanism. Now, with Mike Pence as Vice President, the cause has a longtime loyalist in the White House, not to mention a phalanx of *Republicans* in the House, the Senate, a majority of state governments, and the courts, all carrying out the plan. That plan includes harsher laws to undermine unions, privatizing everything from schools to health care and Social Security, and keeping as many of us as possible from voting. Based on ten years of unique research, *Democracy in Chains* tells a chilling story of right-wing academics and big money run amok. This revelatory work of scholarship is also a call to arms to protect the achievements of twentieth-century American self-government. Penguin Random House, June 2018.
- [3] Michaels, Jon and Noll, David (2024). *Vigilante Nation: How state-sponsored terror threatens our democracy*. Simon & Schuster. readers of *How Democracies Die*, two legal scholars expose the *MAGA Republican* strategy to roll back civil, political, and privacy rights and subvert American democracy - and prescribe a plan for beating the Christian nationalists at their own game.

Time and again, when confronted with serious challenges to their power and privilege, white Christian nationalists seek solace - and satisfaction - in state-supported forms of vigilantism. ... Legal vigilantism has made a surprising, roaring comeback in the months and years following the failed coup of 2021-Jan-06 ... Overlapping networks of right-wing lawyers, politicians, plutocrats, and preachers have resurrected state-supported vigilantism.

Vigilante Nation tells this story of the American Right marginalizing, subordinating, and disenfranchising the increasingly diverse and cosmopolitan members of the American polity. [Simon & Schuster](#), 2024-Oct-08.

Endnotes

- [n1] Sarah Stankorb (Feb. 2025). *The Christian nationalist plot to disenfranchise women voters*. The [Safeguard American Voter Eligibility \(SAVE\) Act](#), which purports to fend off the phantasmal threat of voter fraud, would throw millions of women off the voting rolls. [The New Republic](#), 2025-Feb-21. Accessed 2025-Feb-22.
- [n2] Madhani, Aamer and Smith, Peter (Feb. 2025). *After prayer breakfast, Trump creates task force to root out "anti-Christian bias"*. ... Trump signed an [executive order](#) 2025-Feb-06 directing the new task force to identify unlawful policies, practices, or conduct by all executive departments and agencies, and recommend any additional presidential or legislative action. Early in the day Trump joined the [National Prayer Breakfast](#) at the U.S. Capitol, a more than 70-year-old Washington D.C. tradition that brings together a bipartisan group of lawmakers for fellowship. He told lawmakers there that his relationship with religion had "changed" after a pair of failed assassination attempts last year [2024], and urged Americans to "bring God back" into their lives. ... [The Associated Press](#), 2025-Feb-06. Accessed 2025-Feb-06.
- [n3] McShane, Julianne (Feb. 2025). *Trump just outlined his plan to hand power to Christian nationalists*. "We want to bring religion back - stronger, bigger, better than ever before." We always knew that Trump's return to the White House would bring Christian nationalism to the highest levels of government. There's [Russell Vought](#), an avowed Christian nationalist and an author of [Project 2025](#), who is Trump's pick to lead the [Office of Management and Budget](#) - which leads the implementation of the president's policies, regulations, and funding decisions across the federal government, as my colleague Isabela Dias [has written](#). And there was the pair of Christian podcasters who, at a rally the night before Trump's inauguration, thanked God for "choosing President Donald Trump as a vessel for your nation," as my colleague David Corn [covered](#).
- But at the [National Prayer Breakfast](#) - a decades-old, purportedly interfaith annual event - in Washington, D.C. 2025-Feb-06, President Trump laid out the steps he will take, now that he's in office, to make those dreams of [Christian nationalist](#) power a reality. "We want to bring religion back - stronger, bigger, better than ever before," he said. These measures will allegedly include:
- Creating a so-called Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty, which he so eloquently claimed will "be a very big deal;"
 - Signing an executive order ordering newly-confirmed Attorney General [Pam Bondi](#) to "eradicate anti-Christian bias" inside the federal government and "prosecute anti-Christian violence and vandalism in our society;" and
 - Creating a new Faith Office in the White House, which will be led by the [televangelist and Trump acolyte](#) Rev. [Paula White](#) - who, as my colleagues [Stephanie Mencimer](#) and [Kiera Butler](#) [have written](#), is often associated with an [evangelical](#) Christian movement known as the [New Apostolic Reformation](#), whose leaders claim that God speaks directly to them and "that Christians are called to wage a spiritual battle for control of the United States." ...
- [Mother Jones](#), 2025-Feb-06. Accessed 2025-Feb-06.
- [n4] The Associated Press (Feb. 2025). *What is "ordo amoris"?* Vice President JD Vance invokes this medieval Catholic concept. Vice President JD Vance recently cited medieval Catholic theology in justifying the immigration crackdown under President Donald Trump. "Just Google 'ordo amoris,'" he posted 2025-Jan-30 on the social media platform X. He posted this in reply to criticism over statements he made in a Fox News interview: "You love your family, and then you love your neighbor, and then you love your community, and then you love your fellow citizens in your own country. And then after that, you can focus and prioritize the rest of the world." He claimed that the "far left" has inverted that. ...
- What is 'ordo amoris'?* It's been translated as "order of love" or "order of charity." It's a concept discussed by [St. Augustine](#) ("Augustine of Hippo"), an ancient theologian, who said everyone and everything should be loved in its own proper way. ... [The Associated Press](#), 2025-Feb-06. Accessed 2025-Feb-06.
- [n5] Elliott, Stephen (Sept. 2018). *Beaman Divorce Case Includes Allegations of Emotional Abuse, Use of Prostitutes*. Wife of car magnate and conservative donor claims "degradation, control, manipulation and abuse." Auto dealer and conservative political mega-donor Lee Beaman is due in court next week in his multimillion-dollar divorce case. In her trial brief, Beaman's fourth wife Kelley alleges that Lee Beaman made her watch videos of him having sex with a prostitute - what he called "training videos." On more than one occasion, Kelley Beaman

alleges, her husband persuaded her to have joint sexual encounters with prostitutes. Kelley Beaman says that Lee Beaman was so addicted to pornography that he would watch it on his iPad while sitting in the same room as his family, including his minor son. ...

Lee Beaman, a board member at both [Belmont University](#) (a private Christian university) and [Montgomery Bell Academy](#), has used his fortune to fund his favored political causes for years. ... Among his frequent donations to both local and national conservatives, Beaman made a maximum contribution to [Roy Moore's](#) U.S. Senate campaign three days after The Washington Post reported allegations that the former Alabama judge [had sexual relationships with teenagers](#) while he was in his 30s. Beaman has given more than \$40,000 to groups supporting [Marsha Blackburn's](#) campaign for U.S. Senate. ... [Nashville Scene](#), 2018-Sep-07. Accessed 2025-Feb-28.

- [n6] Saint Dymphna (Aug. 2021). *The binding of Grace Chapel: How Steve Berger sacrificed his church on the altar of authoritarianism*. Where outsiders could only see cracks in the foundation before, the public implosion of [Grace Chapel Church](#) [Franklin, Tennessee; [Calvinist theology](#); now [Southall Church](#)]'s congregation on Sunday morning has exposed the deep rifts in its leadership. ... One source spoke of [Steve Berger](#) specifically targeting wealthy, successful, and well-connected newcomers and demanding their loyalty - not to God or the church, but Berger himself. Perhaps this explains why a disproportionate segment of the congregation consists of politicians, business moguls, and lawyers. ... Vaguely biblical rants seem to be among his favorite tools to berate and publicly humiliate people. ...

After being alienated by the mentors that helped shape his faith - and, it seems, tethered him to reality - Berger began endorsing [conversion therapy](#), the Ugandan "Kill The Gays" bill [Uganda's [Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2014](#) | [Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2023](#)], and a much more rigid idea of [complementarianism](#) [a theological view in some denominations of Christianity, Rabbinic Judaism, and Islam, that men and women have different but complementary roles and responsibilities in marriage, family, and religious life]. He soon settled into a more rabid anti-social-justice niche, preaching against feminism, socialism, and any other efforts to change society for the better.

Around 2014 he first hosted sermons by [Amir Tsarfati](#), a far-right Christian Zionist, who was soon followed by Dr. [Michael L. Brown](#), a Messianic Jew with a raging hatred for 2SLGBTQIA+ people. In 2018 Berger was first invited to the [National Prayer Breakfast](#), and now sits on the board of the Jerusalem prayer breakfast, both linked to shadowy political pressure group "Fellowship International".

Since then Berger has started preaching a dogma of [Christian supremacy](#), [Dominionism](#), and [Reconstructionism](#). For those blissfully unaware of these theological concepts, *Dominionism* is an evangelical movement trying to take dominion of the United States, placing influential Christian leaders in strategic areas of public life like government, culture, and economy. *Reconstructionism*, while it is typically disavowed by even the more extreme Evangelicals, is a highly influential school of thought that advocates the reconstruction of society under Biblical Law according to the interpretation of the preeminent writer of the genre, [R.J. Rushdoony](#). According to the controversial author, that includes for example the stoning of homosexuals, "loose women" and unruly children. ...

Among Berger's adherents are the Governor and First Lady of Tennessee, [Bill](#) and Maria Lee, Tennessee State Senator [Jack Johnson](#), his wife, Judge Deanna Johnson, and real estate tycoon and Republican megadonor Reese Smith III. Berger also has close ties to U.S. Senators [Marsha Blackburn](#) (R-TN) and [Bill Hagerty](#) (R-TN), former U.S. Senator [Bob Corker](#) (R-TN), and former CIA Director and Secretary of State [Mike Pompeo](#). Of late Berger has been spotted on [Telegram](#), a messaging app, soliciting prayers for meetings with congressmen in Washington D.C. ... [Saint Dymphna](#), 2021-Aug-31. Accessed 2025-Feb-28.

- [n7] Willis, Alexander (Dec. 2021). *Steve Berger resigns from Grace Chapel Elder Board following chaotic church service*. [Grace Chapel Church](#) [Franklin, Tennessee; [Calvinist theology](#); now [Southall Church](#)] founding Pastor Steve Berger announced Monday [2021-Dec-27] that he had resigned from his role as a church Elder Board member, and added that he will no longer preach at nor attend the church he and his wife Sarah Berger started more than 26 years ago. ... Berger added that he and his wife will now be "100% focused on ASI," or [Ambassador Services International](#), Berger's nonprofit discipleship program in Washington, D.C., designed to

cater toward elected officials. Grace Chapel is notably the home church of Tennessee Governor [Bill Lee](#). ... [Williamson Scene](#), 2021-Dec-31. Accessed 2025-Feb-28.

- [n8] Daryani, Connor (Sept. 2022). *Trustee Lee Beaman back on board despite past controversy*. [The [Belmont Vision](#) is the official, award-winning online news resource for Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee.] Lee Beaman is back on the Belmont University board of trustees following his highly publicized divorce - a proceeding filled with allegations of verbal and sexual abuse from his fourth wife, Kelley Beaman. ... [Belmont Vision](#), 2022-Feb-16. Accessed 2025-Feb-28.
- [n9] Kaplan, Joshua and Elliott, Justin and Mierjeski, Alex (Feb. 2025). *Speaker Mike Johnson is living in a D.C. house that is the center of a pastor's secretive influence campaign*. In 2021, [Steve Berger](#),^{n6,n7} an evangelical pastor who has attacked the [separation of church and state](#) as "a delusional lie" and called multinational institutions "demonic," set off on an ambitious project. His stated goal: minister to members of U.S. Congress so that what "they learn is then translated into policy." His base of operations would be a six-bedroom, \$3.7 million townhouse blocks from the U.S. Capitol. The house is owned by major Republican donor and Tennessee car magnate [Lee Beaman](#),^{n5,n8} who has joined Berger in advocating for and against multiple bills before Congress. U.S. House Speaker [Mike Johnson](#) has been staying at the home since around the beginning of 2025, according to interviews and videos obtained by ProPublica. ... Berger is vehemently opposed to the World Health Organization, which Trump moved to withdraw the U.S. from last month ... [and] same-sex marriage, saying "it opens the door to all manner of sexual depravity and wickedness" ... In Washington, D.C. Steve Berger quickly made connections at the highest levels of the Republican Party, holding Bible study sessions with senators, representatives and congressional aides. ... [ProPublica](#), 2025-Feb-28. Accessed 2025-Feb-28.
- [n10] Downen, Robert (Mar. 2025). *In Texas, Christian right grows confident and assertive*. Emboldened by court rulings and election victories, the [Christian right](#) is outspoken as it pushes its moral views through the Texas Legislature. ... Efforts by the Christian Right to put more of their religion in public schools are not new. But the tone of those debates in Texas has shifted this session, with bill supporters and some lawmakers openly arguing that such legislation is crucial to combating dropping church participation rates and what they say is a directly related decline in American morality. ...

Such statements have struck even longtime scholars and observers of the Religious Right as setting a new, more strident tone after years in which terms like "religious freedom" were the norm. Many in the movement had avoided explicitly centering Christianity in bills because doing so could prompt court challenges and discrimination complaints. The shift, experts said, reflects a Religious Right emboldened by recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions, the [second Trump administration](#), and the broader normalization of Christian nationalism in the [Republican Party](#) (GOP). ...

In Texas, the Christian Right's rising influence has coincided with the state GOP's alignment with two West Texas oil billionaires, [Tim Dunn](#) and [Farris Wilks](#), who have given tens of millions of dollars to push their far-right religious and social views. And groups like [Project Blitz](#), a coalition of Christian groups with deep Texas ties, have used that long-term approach to steadily normalize their views and chip away at [separation of church and state](#)ⁿ⁹ without drawing widespread opposition.

"Part of their legislative strategy is to be additive," said [Amanda Tyler](#), executive director of the [Baptist Joint Committee For Religious Liberty](#), which advocates for a strong church-state wall. "The idea is that you start lawmakers out with what appear to be lower-stakes legislation, and then once they take votes on that, they will move to more and more extreme versions of the legislation." "What we're seeing now is that strategy really coming to bear in Texas," she added. ... Texas has for years been an incubator for Christian Right policies that are exported to other states or codified into federal law by courts. ... [The Texas Tribune](#), 2025-Mar-17. Accessed 2025-Mar-17.

- [n11] Bollinger, Alex (May 2025). *Donald Trump says America should "forget about" the separation of church and state*. Trump said that instead of a separation of church and state, he will bring "religion back to our country." ...

The executive order says that religious liberty is being violated by "discrimination or hostility from the Government" towards people who are just trying to "practice their faith." It says that some of these attacks have included ones that "infringe upon longstanding conscience protections, prevent parents from sending their

children to religious schools, threaten loss of funding or denial of non-profit tax status for faith-based entities, and single out religious groups and institutions for exclusion from governmental programs."

While the order doesn't get more specific, many of these could apply to LGBTQ+ rights. For example, adoption and fostering agencies that receive government funding have been restricted in some states from discriminating against same-sex couples. Many on the right see this as a form of religious discrimination, arguing that those organizations are religious in nature and therefore can't place children with same-sex couples, and that denying them government funding is a form of religious discrimination. [LGBTQ Nation](#), 2025-May-02. Accessed 2025-May-02.

- [n12] Gibson, Brittany (July 2020). *One billionaire vs. the mail*. The story of billionaire [Charles Koch](#)'s connections, influence, and ideological push to weaken and ultimately privatize one of America's most essential public services. A new [report \[pdf\]](#) details Charles Koch's 50-year war on the [United States Postal Service](#). [The American Prospect](#), 2020-Jul-09. Accessed 2025-Feb-22.
- [n13] Nguyen, Alex (Feb. 2025). *Is This the end of USPS?* [Mother Jones](#), 2025-Feb-22. Accessed 2025-Feb-22.
- [n14] Shankar, Vishal (Mar. 2025). *Wall Street bankers salivate over postal privatization*. At a [Morgan Stanley](#) conference last week, [Elon Musk](#) told attendees the U.S. federal government should privatize "as much as possible" - and singled out the [United States Postal Service](#) as a top target. Musk's comments are the latest in an alarming push from [Trump's](#) team to strip-mine America's oldest and second-most popular agency (the USPS narrowly trails the [National Park Service](#), another victim of Musk's austerity chainsaw). Trump - who has long feuded with the U.S. Postal Service over [mail-in balloting](#) - stated in December 2025 he was "looking at" privatizing the USPS. [Revolving Door Project](#), 2025-Mar-12. Accessed 2025-Mar-12.
- [n15] Meyers, Nathan (Mar. 2025). *Elon Musk is accelerating a 50-year government privatization project*. Trump's [DOGE](#) campaign accelerates a longtime Republican trend. [Salon](#), 2025-Mar-22. Accessed 2025-Mar-22.
- [n16] Prescod, Paul (Mar. 2025). *Wells Fargo is plotting to privatize the post office*. A newly released [memo](#) from the banking giant Wells Fargo outlines a predatory scheme to dismantle the USPS: sell off profitable parts, slash union jobs, and raise prices by up to 140 percent. [Jacobin](#), 2025-Mar-22. Accessed 2025-Mar-22.
- [n17] Pearson, Arn and Armiak, David (Oct. 2023). *After 50 years, this right-wing law factory is crazier than ever*. The [American Legislative Exchange Council](#) (ALEC) is where corporations and far-right groups go to buy government policy. ... Inspired by then California Governor [Ronald Reagan](#) and the [Powell Memorandum](#) (1971), three right-wing legislators in Chicago originally founded ALEC in 1973 as the Conservative Caucus of State Legislators. By 1975, the group designed to promote a socially conservative and pro-corporate agenda at the state level, was renamed the American Legislative Exchange Council, and moved to Washington, D.C. under the leadership of [Paul Weyrich](#), a Christian right activist who also helped found [Heritage Foundation](#) and the [Moral Majority](#). ...

The journey to passage of an ALEC [model bill] typically begins at a luxury resort hotel during one of ALEC's summer annual meetings or late-fall policy summits. Once there, corporate leaders and ALEC legislators - many of whom receive "[scholarships](#)" for their travel and lodging paid for by corporate lobbyists in their home states - meet in one of ALEC's ten policy [task force](#) meetings to consider legislative proposals typically drafted by corporations, trade associations, or right-wing think tanks. ... ALEC currently [claims](#) to have 300 corporate and foundation members, and more than 2,000 legislative members, with [over 200](#) in state leadership positions. ...

ALEC allowed the Family Research Council to tack on a [Pro-Life Legislative Summit](#) at the end of its December 2022 policy summit that featured [Jonathan Mitchell](#), "the author of the groundbreaking [Texas Heartbeat Act](#)," speaking on "how states can respond to one of the most eagerly awaited Supreme Court cases - [Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization](#) - and see successful legislation like the Texas Heartbeat Act [[Persagen.org](#) entry] passed in your state."

This summer [2023] ALEC kicked off its annual meeting with a reception for its legislators and [Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America](#) (SBA) to discuss the "post-Dobbs policy environment and state jurisdiction to protect the right to life." Attendees at that meeting were fed a [constant diet](#) of anti-abortion arguments and misinformation from SBA and the National Right to Life Committee. ... Nearly [700 ALEC legislators](#) in 22 states have already voted to ban abortion. ...

[The American Prospect](#), 2023-Oct-04. Accessed 2025-Mar-10.